

State of Connecticut



GENERAL ASSEMBLY

COMMISSION ON CHILDREN

EMBEDDING PREVENTION TASK FORCE UPDATE

AUGUST 2004

Background

Four years ago, Connecticut partnered with six other states to begin the hard work of "Embedding prevention in state practice and policy." Funded by a grant from the National Crime Prevention Council, under the leadership of Commissioner Patricia Wilson-Coker, Department of Social Services, and Laura Lee Simon, Chair Emeritus of the Commission on Children, a strong coalition of state and private sector organizations representing health, education, public safety, media, business, academia and family, convened to develop a public policy agenda for prevention in Connecticut.



Commissioner Patricia Wilson-Coker, DSS



Chair Emeritus, COC, Laura Lee Simon

The following are highlights of the major accomplishments and ongoing work of the many partners committed to the health, safety, learning and well being of children and families in Connecticut.

Governance/Policy: Establishment of the State Prevention Council

Goals of the State Prevention Council centered on four major areas:

- policy/governance;
- public awareness;
- best practices; and
- measurable outcomes and budget allocation.

Public Act 01-121 established the State Prevention Council, composed of the Commissioners of eight state agencies, led by Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management, charged with developing a state prevention plan and state prevention budget. The law requires state agencies to work collaboratively to: 1) create a prevention framework for the state; 2) recommend a comprehensive statewide prevention plan; 3) better coordinate existing and future state agency prevention expenditures, and 4) increase fiscal accountability.

The act defines "prevention" as policies and programs that 1) promote healthy, safe, and productive lives and 2) reduce the likelihood of crime, violence, substance abuse, illness, academic failure, and other socially destructive behaviors.

Accomplishments: Developed the state prevention plans and state prevention budget that guides the work of prevention in the state.

Goals and Outcomes: How to Measure Success

Public Act 03-145 charged the Prevention Council to establish cross cutting goals and outcomes for prevention. The law states:

c) The State Prevention Council shall determine long-term goals, strategies and outcome measures to promote the health and well being of children and families. Such goals include, but are not limited to: Cost-effective, research-based, early intervention strategies; an increase in pregnant women and newborns who are healthy; a decrease in the rate of child neglect and abuse; an increase in children who are ready for school; an increase in children who succeed in school; a decrease in children who are unsupervised after school; an increase in youth who choose healthy behaviors and become successful working adults; a decrease in juvenile suicide; a decrease in juvenile crime; and an increase in access to health care and stable housing.

The council shall design a plan for inter-agency and intra-agency implementation of such goals and strategies and shall submit such plan, in accordance with section 11-4a, to the Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management and the joint standing committee of the General Assembly, having cognizance of matters relating to appropriations not later than January 1, 2004.

Overview of State Prevention Council Activities:

1. What Connecticut Citizens Think about Prevention: The COC conducted the first poll on attitudes about prevention in Connecticut. Sponsored by Research!America in cooperation with the Commission on Children and the Embedding Prevention Initiative, residents responded to issues of health promotion, safety and disease prevention; “sin taxes” and after school programs. More than 60% of residents expressed support for a range of prevention programs including after school, school readiness, and child abuse prevention.

Poll results show Connecticut residents say:

- Increase “sin taxes” on cigarettes and alcohol to fund health promotion and disease prevention research;
- Violence and child abuse can be prevented with increased parent involvement and parenting skills;
- Smoking, child vaccinations, safe sex, and wearing seat belts are key prevention issues; and
- Preventable diseases and injuries in the country are major health problems.



2. Listening Tour Report: Community input on prevention: The Commission on Children and the Governor’s Prevention Partnership conducted community meetings to obtain community perspectives on prevention. The report, ***Listening Tour: Community Conversations on Prevention***, summarizes the views of more than 140 Connecticut citizens. Key findings include:

- Build strong local/state partnerships for prevention
- Strong sense of promise regarding the State Prevention Council
- Prevention could save dollars and limit crisis
- Desire for more focused state action



2. Media Roundtable: What Makes a Great Story? How to Influence the News on Behalf of Children and Prevention

The Commission on Children, in conjunction with The Connecticut Forum, convened a Media Roundtable with Embedding Partners and state/national media experts from print media, radio, and TV for a candid dialogue on how to present children's issues and what makes a good news story on children's issues. This cross-section of communications experts, authors, researchers and policy leaders set out to:

- Develop a greater understanding of media and what informs and influences its work.
- Discuss highlighting prevention policies/programs that contribute to children's lifelong success;
- Assess how to make research available, relevant and compelling for the media; and
- Strive to develop new, vibrant language on prevention issues for health, safety and learning.



Charles Ogletree, (*standing far right*) from Harvard Law School, moderated the discussion that married the worlds of media to the worlds of child advocates. He challenged the group on how they can enhance each others' work; and how advocates can influence the news. Public awareness and education is key to shaping public policy. Child advocates need to understand what drives different media outlets to be able to work within that "world."

The challenge is to capture a news-breaking event as well as "inform" on prevention at the event. Advocates were encouraged to form relationships with key media people and provide research, data and insights into children's issues and to view the media as

partners and work within the domain of the news.

The Roundtable was funded by Research!America, The Child Health and Development Institute, The Community Foundation of Greater New Haven, the Connecticut Health Foundation, the National Crime Prevention Council, the Shei'rah Foundation, Sheila Perrin, Travelers Foundation and the Betty R. Sheffer Foundation.

Linking Prevention to Federal and State Policy Trends:

Linking prevention to current federal and state opportunities to further embed prevention in state policy and budget priorities helps to promote prevention in a broader context. The Embedding Task Force Partners have worked together to anchor prevention in several ongoing state initiatives.

1. School Readiness: *Opening the Kindergarten Door: The Preschool Difference*, a study initiated by the Commission on Children at the request of the Connecticut General Assembly's Education Committee with support from the State Department of Education and the Connecticut Center for School Change, April 2004.



Findings

- Children with two years of preschool were twice as likely to be seen as ready for kindergarten in language and literacy skills, math skills, social/emotional skills; fine motor skills; than their peers without preschool.

- Parent engagement is related to years of preschool experience. 87% of the parents of children with two years of preschool were seen as highly involved in their child's education.
- The relationship between the preschool experience and kindergartens not strong enough, impacting transition and school preparedness for each child.
- Children are entering kindergarten with many health problems. 65% of the teachers identified specific health problems such as asthma, skin rashes, ringworm and lack of physical exams.

*Research conducted by
Kristine L. Mika, PhD.
Mika Research & Training, LLC*

2. Outcomes Indicators and Benchmarks.

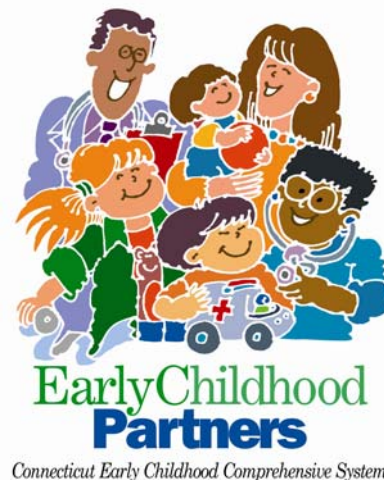
The Embedding Initiative partnered with several state initiatives concerning creating a system of accountability, how to measure success.

- The Connecticut Coalition for the Advancement of Prevention developed a set of outcomes and indicators based on state agency data and expected outcomes in key policy areas. Led by the State Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, the project organized key state data collected cross state agencies into family and child health and education outcomes and indicators. They were included in the State Prevention Plan.
- **School Readiness Initiative:** Making Progress for Young Children, a statewide effort to identify key school readiness indicators. The Connecticut Early Childhood Indicators Team developed a set of 25 key indicators of progress. Led by the State Department of Social Services in conjunction with the Child Health Development Institute funded by the Packard Foundation, the project helped inform state school readiness benchmarks and the development of infant/toddler child care standards. It helped inform the work of the Prevention Council on early childhood.

3. Successful Anti-Bullying Efforts

- **Public Act No. 02-119**, An Act Concerning Bullying Behavior in Schools and Concerning the Pledge of Allegiance. Raising awareness of the importance of safe school environments to school achievement, legislation passed requiring school districts to develop anti-bullying policies and to allow for students to report on incidences of bullying anonymously.
- There is a major anti-bullying conference planned for January 2005 by the Commission on Children, Governor's Prevention Partnership and the State Department of Education.

Ongoing Initiatives Promoting Prevention:



1. Early Childhood Partners: Building a Comprehensive Early Childhood System
The State Department of Public Health leads a statewide planning initiative launched by the federal Maternal and Child Health Bureau to support the work of the state Title V Maternal and Child Health Services programs' in collaborative system development efforts. The goal is to bring together systems serving the health and childcare needs of children to create a continuum of care that is family focused. The State Prevention Council acts as the advisory and partner.

2. Childhood Poverty: Public Act No. 04-238 establishes State Child Poverty Council to develop a long-term plan to reduce poverty by 50% over the next ten years. The State Prevention Council sits on the Council as well as the Commission on Children, Children's Trust Fund, Child Advocate, legislative leaders and key state agencies. The Office of Policy and Management will oversee the development and implementation of the plan.



3. After School: Keeping Kids Safe and Smart: Public Act No. 03-206, An Act Concerning After School Programming, establishes a statewide after school advisory committee led by the State Department of Education in conjunction with the Commission on Children and Department of Social Services. The Council represents broad stakeholders including business, philanthropy, after school programs and state agencies serving children and youth. The After School Report developed in its first year of operation, outlines a blueprint for expanding supply, quality and sustainability. The state successfully won a Mott foundation grant to fund the Connecticut School Age Child Care Association to act as Connecticut's after school intermediary to work with the State Advisory Committee to implement Connecticut's after school growth plan.

4. Communications Campaign: A Model Communications Campaign to Build Support for Prevention Programs and Policies: The Commission on Children in conjunction with the National Crime Prevention Council and CPTV developed a comprehensive three-year public education and model communications campaign proposal to elevate the issue of preventive strategies for children to a high, actionable priority for elected officials.

The plan seeks to engage influential citizens, parents, and policymakers through a public education campaign that involves multiple communications and outreach tools. This enhances the work of the State Prevention Council, which identified public awareness and education as a key strategy in the State Prevention Plan.

4. Connecticut for Community Youth Development (CCYD). This state initiative fosters the development of youth ages 12 through 18 by promoting a youth development approach that focuses on positive abilities and assets of the adolescent population. The initiative helps strengthen state and local network's involvement in prevention; improves data collection on prevention programs to enhance system measurement capabilities; issued a comprehensive report on the Importance of After School to Children and Youth; developed an evaluation tool used by state agencies to measure state programs and offers a vehicle to share and implement best practices and on going training opportunities.

The next meeting of the State Prevention Council is scheduled for September 2004. Details TBA.

Copies of this Update can be downloaded from the COC website: www.cga.state.ct.us/coc/